

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device, the method comprising the steps of:

loaning a removable digital storage medium to a customer for insertion into a digital image acquisition device and for storage of digital image data captured by the digital image acquisition device;

receiving, upon return, the removable digital storage medium from the customer;

selectably erasing digital image data contained on the returned removable digital storage medium; and

maintaining information associated with the loan and return of the removable digital storage medium and the customer,

wherein said erasing step is selectably executed by the customer when the removable digital storage medium is returned, such that said erasing step is executed if the customer elects to erase and is not executed if the customer elects not to erase.

2. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 1, wherein the removable digital storage medium is lent at a first rental location and received at a second rental location.

3. (Original) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 2, wherein the first rental location and the second rental location are the same location.

4. (Original) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 2, wherein the first rental location and the second rental location are different locations.

5. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 2, wherein the removable digital storage medium is associated with an identification code.

6. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 5, wherein the identification code associated with the removable digital storage medium is securely stored on the removable digital storage medium, and is not erased in said erasing step.

7. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 5, wherein the maintaining step further comprises assigning the identification code to the removable digital storage medium.

8. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 5, wherein the maintaining step further comprises:

assigning an identification code to the customer;

associating the identification code of the removable digital storage medium with the identification code of the customer when the customer is lent the removable digital storage medium; and

disassociating the identification code of the removable digital storage medium and the identification code of the customer when the removable digital storage medium is received from the customer.

9. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 5, wherein the maintaining step further comprises:

removing the identification code of the removable digital storage medium from inventory of the first rental location when the removable digital storage medium is lent by the first rental location to the customer; and

adding the identification code of the removable digital storage medium to inventory of the second rental location when the removable digital storage medium is received by the second rental location.

10. (Original) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 9, wherein information associated with the inventories of the first and second rental locations is stored in a data store which is accessible by any of a plurality of rental locations.

11. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 10, wherein the maintaining step further comprises the steps of:

assigning an identification code to each of a plurality of rental locations;

associating the identification code of a removable digital storage medium with the identification code of a rental location when the rental location receives the removable digital storage medium; and

disassociating the identification code of a removable digital storage medium from the identification code of a rental location when the rental location lends the removable digital storage medium.

12. (Original) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 11, further comprising balancing the inventory of the first and second rental locations.

13. (Original) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 12, the balancing step further comprising the steps of:

determining a number of removable digital storage media located at each of the first and second rental locations; and

transferring removable digital storage media from the first rental location to the second rental location when it is determined that the first rental location has an excess number of removable digital storage media and the second rental location has a deficient number of removable digital storage media.

14. (Original) A method of renting removable digital storage media for use with a digital image acquisition device according to Claim 13, the balancing step further comprising requesting a transfer of removable digital storage media from a first rental location by a second rental location when it is determined that the second rental location has a deficient number of removable digital storage media.

15. (Currently Amended) A method of renting removable digital storage media, the method comprising the steps of:

loaning a removable digital storage medium to a customer for insertion into a digital data acquisition device and for storage of digital data thereon;

receiving, upon return, the removable digital storage medium from the customer;

processing the digital data stored on the returned removable digital storage medium;

selectably erasing digital image data contained on the returned removable digital storage medium; and

maintaining information associated with the loan and return of the removable digital storage medium and information associated with the customer,

wherein said erasing step is selectably executed by the customer when the removable digital storage medium is returned, such that said erasing step is executed if the customer elects to erase and is not executed if the customer elects not to erase.

16. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 15, wherein the processing step further comprises making the digital data contained on the received removable digital storage medium available to the customer.

17. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 16, wherein the processing step further comprises the steps of:

transferring the digital data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer to another digital storage medium; and providing the other digital storage medium containing the transferred data to the customer.

18. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 16, wherein the processing step further comprises the steps of:

uploading the digital data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer to a computer server; and

providing the customer with access to the computer server.

19. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 16, wherein the processing step further comprises emailing the digital data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer to one or more email accounts specified by the customer.

20. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 16, wherein the digital data is digital image data, and wherein the processing step further comprises printing the digital image data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer using an image forming apparatus.

21. (Cancelled)

22. (Previously Presented) A method of renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 15, wherein the processing step further comprises the step of verifying the functionality of the received removable digital storage medium.

23. (Currently Amended) A system for renting removable digital storage media at a first rental location to a customer for insertion into a digital image acquisition device and for storage of digital image data captured by the digital image acquisition device and receiving, upon return, the removable digital storage media at a second rental location from the customer, the system comprising a processing system for processing the digital image data on returned ones of said rented removable digital storage media including an erasure subsystem for selectable erasure of digital image data thereon, and a maintenance system for maintaining information associated with the rental and return of returned ones of the removable digital storage media and the customer,

wherein said erasure subsystem is configured for selectable activation by the customer, such that erasure is executed if the customer elects to erase and is not executed if the customer elects not to erase.

24. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 23, wherein a removable digital storage medium is associated with an identification code.

25. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 24, wherein the identification code associated with the removable digital storage medium is securely stored on the removable digital storage medium, and is not erased by said processing system.

26. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 24, wherein the maintenance system further assigns the identification code to the removable digital storage medium.

27. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 24, wherein the maintenance system further comprises:

an assignment system that assigns an identification code to the customer; and

an association system that associates the identification code of the removable digital storage medium with the identification code of the customer when the customer is lent the removable digital storage medium, and disassociates the identification code of the removable digital storage medium and the identification code of the customer when the removable digital storage medium is received from the customer.

28. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 23, wherein the maintenance system further comprises an inventory system that removes the identification code of the removable digital storage medium from inventory of the first rental location when the removable digital storage medium is lent by the first rental location to the customer and adds the identification code of the removable digital storage medium to inventory of the second rental location when the removable digital storage medium is received by the second rental location.

29. (Original) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 28, wherein information associated with the inventories of the first and second rental locations is stored in a data store which is accessible by any of a plurality of rental locations.

30. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 29, wherein the maintenance system further comprises:

an assignment system that assigns an identification code to each of a plurality of rental locations; and

an association system that associates the identification code of a removable digital storage medium with the identification code of a rental location when the rental location receives the removable digital storage medium and disassociates the identification code of a removable digital storage medium from the identification code of a rental location when the rental location lends the removable digital storage medium.

31. (Original) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 30, further comprising a balancing system for balancing the inventory of the first and second rental locations.

32. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 31, wherein the balancing system further comprising:

a determination system that determines a number of removable digital storage media located at each of the first and second rental locations; and

a transferring system that transfers removable digital storage media from the first rental location to the second rental location when it is determined that the first rental location has an excess number of removable digital storage media and the second rental location has a deficient number of removable digital storage media.

33. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 32, wherein the balancing system further comprising a requesting system for requesting a transfer of removable digital storage media from a first rental location by a second rental location when it is determined that the second rental location has a deficient number of removable digital storage media.

34. (Currently Amended) A system for renting removable digital storage media to a customer for insertion into a digital data acquisition device and for storage of digital data and receiving, upon return, the removable digital storage media from the customer, the system comprising:

a processing system that processes the digital data stored on returned ones of said rental removable digital storage media including an erasure subsystem for selectable erasure of digital data thereon; and

a maintenance system that maintains information associated with the loan and return of returned ones of the removable digital storage media and information associated with the customer,

wherein said erasure subsystem is configured for selectable activation by the customer, such that erasure is executed if the customer elects to erase and is not executed if the customer elects not to erase.

35. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 34, wherein the processing system further comprises a producing system for making the digital data contained on the received removable digital storage medium available to the customer.

36. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 35, wherein the processing system further comprises:

a transfer system that transfers the digital data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer to another digital storage medium; and
a provision system that provides the other digital storage medium containing the transferred data to the customer.

37. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 35, wherein the processing system further comprises:

an upload system that uploads the digital data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer to a computer server; and
a provision system that provides the customer with access to the computer server.

38. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 35, wherein the processing system further comprises an email system that emails the digital data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer to one or more email accounts specified by the customer.

39. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 35, wherein the digital data is digital image data, and wherein the processing system further comprises a print system that prints the digital image data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer.

40. (Cancelled)

41. (Previously Presented) A system for renting removable digital storage media according to Claim 34, wherein the processing system further comprises a verification system that verifies the functionality of the received removable digital storage medium.

42. (Currently Amended) Computer-executable process steps stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer-executable process steps to effect rental of a removable digital storage medium to a customer for insertion into a digital image acquisition device and for storage of digital image data captured by the digital image acquisition device and to receive, upon return, the removable digital storage medium from the customer, the computer-executable process steps comprising code to selectably erase digital image data contained on the returned removable digital storage medium, and code to maintain information associated with the loan and return of the removable digital storage medium and the customer,

wherein said code to erase digital image data contained on the returned removable digital storage medium is configured for selectable activation by the customer, such that said code to erase is executed if the customer elects to erase and is not executed if the customer elects not to erase.

43. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 42, wherein the removable digital storage medium is associated with an identification code.

44. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 43, wherein the identification code associated with the removable digital storage medium is securely stored on the removable digital storage medium and is not erased by said erasure code.

45. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 43, wherein the code to maintain further comprises code to assign an identification code to the removable digital storage medium.

46. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 43, the code to maintain further comprising:

code to assign an identification code to the customer;
code to associate the identification code of the removable digital storage medium with the identification code of the customer when the customer is lent the removable digital storage medium; and
code to disassociate the identification code of the removable digital storage medium and the identification code of the customer when the removable digital storage medium is received from the customer.

47. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 46, the code to maintain further comprising:

code to remove the identification code of the removable digital storage medium from inventory of a first rental location when the removable digital storage medium is lent by the first rental location to the customer; and
code to add the identification code of the removable digital storage medium to inventory of a second rental location when the removable digital storage medium is received by the second rental location.

48. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 47, the code to maintain further comprising:

code to assign an identification code to each of a plurality of rental locations;

code to associate the identification code of a removable digital storage medium with the identification code of a rental location when the rental location receives the removable digital storage medium; and

code to disassociate the identification code of a removable digital storage medium from the identification code of a rental location when the rental location lends the removable digital storage medium.

49. (Original) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 48, the code to maintain further comprising code to balance the inventory of the first and second rental locations.

50. (Original) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 49, the code to balance further comprising:

code to determine a number of removable digital storage media located at each of the first and second rental locations; and

code to transfer removable digital storage media from the first rental location to the second rental location when it is determined that the first rental location has

an excess number of removable digital storage media and the second rental location has a deficient number of removable digital storage media.

51. (Original) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 50, the code to maintain further comprising code to request a transfer of removable digital storage media from a first rental location by a second rental location when it is determined that the second rental location has a deficient number of removable digital storage media.

52. (Currently Amended) Computer-executable process steps stored on a computer-readable medium, the computer-executable process steps to effect rental of a removable digital storage medium to a customer for insertion into a digital data acquisition device and for storage of digital data and to receive, upon return, the removable digital storage medium from the customer, the computer-executable process steps comprising:

code to process the digital data stored on the returned removable digital storage medium including code for selectable erasure of digital data thereon; and

code to maintain information associated with the loan and return of the removable digital storage medium and information associated with the customer,

wherein said code for erasure of digital data on the returned removable digital storage medium is configured for selectable activation by the customer, such that said code for erasure is executed if the customer elects to erase and is not executed if the customer elects not to erase.

53. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 52, wherein the code to process further comprises code to make the digital data contained on the received removable digital storage medium available to the customer.

54. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 53, wherein the code to process further comprises:

code to transfer the digital data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer to another digital storage medium; and
code to provide the other digital storage medium containing the transferred data to the customer.

55. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 53, wherein the code to process further comprises:

code to upload the digital data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer to a computer server; and
code to provide the customer with access to the computer server.

56. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 53, wherein the code to process further comprises code to email the digital data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer to one or more email accounts specified by the customer.

57. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 53, wherein the digital data is digital image data, and wherein the code to process further comprises code to print the digital image data contained on the removable digital storage medium received from the customer.

58. (Cancelled)

59. (Previously Presented) Computer-executable process steps according to Claim 52, wherein the code to process further comprises code to verify the functionality of the received removable digital storage medium.